

IN JUSTICE TO MEXICO.\*

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*The Nation that Never Had a Chance.*

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BY PAUL KERSCH.

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No American judge or jury would find guilty or punish a poor creature, begging for a chance he never had, born of tainted parentage, and reared in impossible surroundings; such a one would be committed to corrective treatment and kind care and given his chance and any other course would be resented. After familiarizing ourselves with the history of Mexico we can arrive at no other conclusion but that her wretched people are the irresponsible victims of precisely the same influences and that they, too, never had a chance. Rather than to insist on their punishment or the forfeiture of their independence for which they suffered and bled as have no other people in modern times and which they finally won for their country, but, alas, not for themselves, we should insist on their being given the chance for which they are begging, to which they are entitled and to which we alone may help them.

God has endowed most of his children with the taunting capacity to behold in their dreams the "Ideal Land," upon the children of Mexico alone seems He to have bestowed the golden reality, lavishing upon their land all the gifts and graces for which the weltschmerz of the ages has yearned and wept in vain.

The merciful hand of Providence has bestowed on the Mexicans a magnificent land, abounding in resources of every kind—a land where none ought to be poor and where misery ought not to be known—a land whose products and riches of every kind abound, and are as varied as they are rich. It is a country endowed to profusion with every gift that men desire and envy; every sort of climate from the eternal snows to the glories of the tropics enshrined in the majestic beauty of heaven itself, and of inconceivable fertility.

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Thus God gave paradise and men, His men, the children of Christ, befouled its immaculate beauty with all the hideous filth of hades.

"Mother of Western civilization; cradle of the American race! A thousand years have been gathered into the sheaf of time since her first cities were built. When the Norsemen coasted our northern shores she had towns and villages, and white-walled temples and palaces. When the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, a hundred years had already passed since the soldiers of Cortés had battled with the hosts of Montezuma.

"Of all that vast empire which once acknowledged the authority of Spain in the New World, no portion, for interest and importance, can be compared with Mexico; and this equally, whether we consider the variety of its soil or climate; the inexhaustible stores of its mineral wealth; its scenery, grand and picturesque, beyond example; the character of its ancient inhabitants, not only far surpassing in intelligence that of the other North American races, but reminding us, by their monuments, of the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Hindustan; or lastly, the stirring circumstances of its conquest, adventurous and romantic as any legend devised by Norman or Italian bard of chivalry, and as sad and inexorable as any tragedy devised by classic Greece."—*Prescott*.

#### THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO.

This, then, was the fairyland which Hernando Cortés and his band of fortune hunters beheld when they landed on its shores on April 12, 1519, and found it in possession of the Aztec Indians, who had developed a surprising system of government, education, and culture, which had produced a happy, hardy race of unsophisticated morals and clean character, proper enough, Cortés seems to have thought in Christian people, but altogether unwarranted in heathenish folk. As it became quickly evident that the country was fabulously rich in precious metal he determined to conquer it at all cost, and, under the pretext of the Cross (nowadays he would have done it in the name of civilization or the "Hoehere Kultur," no doubt), and the aid of other Indians, whom he later promptly betrayed, he succeeded three years later; burn-

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ing cities, temples and libraries, butchering or enslaving the natives, ravishing their women, and killing their trustful kings. His reward was the governorship of New Spain, as the Spaniards named the land. From 1525 to 1821 their possessions in Mexico and Central America were jointly ruled by sixty-seven viceroys, for the most Spanish nobles, prelates, or court politicians who sought and administered the position for selfish purposes, chiefly with the idea of repairing their delapidated fortunes. They were responsible to the Spanish king only and the powerful and corrupt "Consejo de las Indias" thousands of miles away, and during their regime of nearly three centuries, country and natives were ruthlessly exploited for the sole benefit of a few favorites, the hierarchy and the crown. Foreigners were excluded, the natives kept in ignorance, education being monopolized by the clergy, and the best land, the most profitable commerce, and all the influential offices were held by the Spaniards and their sycophants, while enormous fortunes were being wrung from the coerced and enslaved natives, who in the dense ignorance and dark superstition intentionally imposed upon them suffered in helpless silence. The two or three of the many viceroys who did attempt to better the lot of the natives are conspicuous in Mexican history, and their memory is revered even today, but their efforts left no impression and the plight of the miserable natives remained as before. Their doom seemed sealed when in 1571 the Tribunal of Inquisition was formally established in Mexico with its purpose of suppressing the activities of possible reformers and of persecuting all those who showed dangerous liberal ideas and gathered too much power and influence. Not until two hundred and fifty years later was it suppressed, after a reign of persecution and terror as bloody and wanton as any page of its infamous history in Spain.

#### THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE.

Finally, however, the members of the Spanish hierarchy having grown soft and indolent in their power and opulence, no longer willing to shoulder the arduous burdens of the humble parish priests, decided to admit a few chosen natives to their monopolized educational institutions for the purpose of filling these places.

Within a few years these priests began to apply their education for the good of their humble flocks, and the spirit of revolt long smouldering burst into furious flames. It came to a head under the leadership of one of their number, Miguel Hidalgo, who in 1810 with his "Grito de Dolores" sounded the death-knell of Spanish misrule in Mexico, though he and other leaders of his untrained Indian armies after their defeat were promptly executed, as was four years later his successor, another parish priest, Maria Morales.

During 1810, until 1821, when Iturbide's defeating the Spanish forces, made himself Emperor of Mexico, the fires of revolution had incessantly been raging, drenching the country with the blood of its sons. But the new emperor selling out to the elements who had enjoyed most of the power and wealth under the Spanish regime, and who were now scheming not only to retain what they had but to possess themselves of that considerable portion which had gone to the Spanish crown before, gave rise to another outbreak, led by General Santa Ana, who, after defeating the emperor, proclaimed the first republic and had Iturbide executed when in 1824 he returned from his exile and backed by his old support attempted to overthrow the republic.

#### THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

Yet, still no peace! A great conflict began raging between the conservatives, consisting of the old privileged classes and the liberals, embracing the republican elements, and Spain perceiving in the turmoil an opportunity of seizing Mexico once more sent an army across in 1829. Utterly defeated Spain's power came to an end, but not until 1836 did she finally recognize Mexico's independence. In the meantime revolutionary outbreaks had continued incessantly, and what peace there was, was maintained by force of arms. Conditions did not improve, when in 1832 Santa Ana obtained the presidency. Shrewd, courageous, but unprincipled, this gifted creole was quick to espouse any cause promising personal advancement, and during his regime the republic was in constant turmoil, precluding any material or educational progress. After his overthrow some of the democratic spirits of that

epoch attempted seriously to combat retrogression by working for the absolute liberty of the press; the abolishment of special class privileges, which gave the clergy and army great advantages over the masses; the separation of church and state, including the suppression of monastic institutions; the restoration and maintenance of the national credit by a readjustment of the public debt; and a number of other reforms, which would have worked for the country's good. But no sooner did they proceed to execute them when the old reactionaries got behind Santa Ana, restive in his retirement, who soon assumed the unlimited powers of dictatorship, while the lovers of liberal institutions and good government looked on without the power to interfere. Mexico's reputation for instability was now assured. The people were regarded as restless, revolutionary, and savage. The republic now became a military oligarchy, and until 1847 the supreme power was vested in who ever happened to be at the time the most successful military leader. Conditions in Mexico were anarchical, life and property were unsafe, education impossible, and the reputation of the country was at its worst. To add to the general suffering and demoralization Texas had seceded, and its absorption by the United States culminated in war which lasted until 1848, and resulted in the cession to the northern republic of the Mexican territory now comprising the states of New Mexico and California, and in the retirement of Santa Ana. Only one short year of peace followed, and for the first time in Mexican history was a constitutionally elected president allowed to take his seat. But no sooner did he attempt a reform administration, than the old reactionary crowd caused another wide spread revolutionary movement and made Santa Ana once more dictator of Mexico, and now followed the most vicious and despotic period the miserable country had yet known. The press was muzzled, high liberals were executed or imprisoned, and on December 16, 1853, Santa Ana issued a decree declaring himself "Perpetual Dictator." But revolution long brewing forced him in 1855 to leave the country.

Shorn of much territory, utterly exhausted and demoralized a period of comparative quiet followed. A great program was being prepared the following years in a legislative way in freeing

the natives of their bondage and ignorance by Presidents Comonfort and Benito Juarez, but their splendid efforts were still largely confined to paper when in 1861 a French army invaded Mexico and war and revolution raged again for six long years, terminating all reforms and once more subjecting the country to general prostration. Finally, in 1867, when the French army was forced to depart under demands from the United States government, and the thus deserted Emperor Maximilian was captured and executed after a short and turbulent reign of three years, the way seemed clear for peace and reform, but soon the jealousies of contesting leaders brought on another series of revolutionary outbreaks, and not until 1876, when General Diaz had succeeded in defeating all his opponents and victoriously entered the capital did Mexico finally find a semblance of rest.

Between 1821 and 1876 the Mexican form of government was changed twelve times, over fifty-five men succeeding each other as presidents, dictators, or emperors, and more than three hundred revolutionary outbreaks marked that period, as well as three bloody wars. If there ever was a child among the nations of the world who never had a chance, surely Mexico is the one!

Where such remnants of the feudal system as special grants, charters, and privileges of every kind were suffered to creep in and to harden into vested and hereditary rights as in Mexico either by the hands who guided Mexico's fortunes or through the unwary illiteracy and ignorance of the masses the continuous cycle of unproductive physical revolutions which characterize Mexico's history from the Spanish overthrow to the present time was as inevitable as it was logical, and the worst of it was that it prevented the correction of its chief cause, namely general schooling and education, thus cutting off all prospects for the future.

Much of the long reign of President Diaz was necessarily taken up with the elementary reconstruction of civil government and the rehabilitation of Mexico's industries and finances, and while he conceived a very elaborate program of enforced general education, little was done in the way of carrying it out, and at the time of its overthrow over eighty-five per cent of the fifteen million of Mexican people remained totally illiterate. Since his fall,

in 1911, the old history of Mexico has been repeating itself with accelerated speed and virulence, leaving the lot of the people as hopeless as ever.

Too trustful and guileless in their ignorance to suspect their leaders who served them only, with few laudable exceptions, so as to deliver them more securely to this or that set of foreign or domestic exploiters, these miserable people were continually robbed of the fruits of their unparalleled sacrifices. As long as the masses remained ignorant, the interests had nothing to fear from within, and from without there were only the United States who might make it uncomfortable for them. To discredit this source of danger and to turn it to their own advantage, if possible, they cunningly and systematically set out to villify the character and to discredit the intentions of the United States. True, heretofore, the governments of the United States had proved rather obliging than otherwise, but they would take no chances and prepare for one that might some day accidentally represent and act in the spirit of the American people and set out to expose and discredit them, break their strangle hold on the Mexican masses and punish *them* for the crimes against life and property in Mexico rather than be intrigued into making war which would only further punish a long suffering people for crimes committed by their feudal betrayers, allowing them to escape unpunished and with their pockets full.

#### THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF MEXICO.

The internal problems of Mexico are primarily, of course, the cursed legacy of imperial Spain. Hopelessly left behind in the onward progression of adjacent development, Mexico with its marvelous resources coveted by a hungry world has proved a great stumbling block in the way of America's peaceful policy and progress.

Europe is now paying the bloodiest toll in all history as a result of a similar legacy left by imperial Turkey in the Balkan Peninsula.

Nor is the analogy between the Mexican and the Balkan problems far fetched, differing mainly in degree through the European

circumstances of a greater multiplicity of sovereignties, a greater exhaustion of natural resources, and a denser population, and also in the sinister fact that the Mexican problem has a bi-hemispheric as well as an hemispheric significance these days.

Three centuries of Spanish despotism in Mexico dominated solely by the bigotry and lusts of the conquering race, giving little or no thought to the uplift and education of the subjected masses, followed by fifty years of almost continuous bloody revolutions and wars, left them in dense ignorance, dark superstition, in hopeless poverty, and constitutionally vitiated, easy victims of an unscrupulous and unrestrained minority of education, energy, and intelligence that absorbed most of the substance and all of the power.

What mattered it, when after the breakup of the Spanish dominion, Mexico acquired formal independence. The slave-drivers of the old era gave way to other slave-drivers, if not in name, certainly in substance, and if not by intention, certainly as the inevitable consequence of their superior energy and intelligence, for the masses had remained neglected.

What mattered it when Benito Juarez finally dispossessed it and formally freed the masses by giving them a constitution patterned after that of the United States. Many decades have passed since, including three of comparative peace and tranquility under the regime of Diaz, affording all the time and every opportunity for the fruits of the constitution and the restored equality of opportunity to develop, and yet the conditions today are nothing but a serene continuation of the impossible conditions Juarez attempted to remedy and Diaz hoped ultimately to meet by his phenomenal resurrection of Mexico's industries, finances, and credit.

#### THE VAIN EFFORTS OF DIAZ.

It is doing a great injustice to the memory of this sterling character, devoted patriot, and extraordinary executive to accuse him of wilfully selling out to foreign interests and playing into the hands of the old crowd who had remained in the saddle in spite of countless revolutions. The truth is that he had no other alternative but to accept their assistance in developing the resources of the republic so that as quickly as possible sufficient



revenues could be secured to establish stable civil governments throughout the country, build harbors and roads, reinstate Mexico's foreign credit, and secure impatient foreign creditors and claimants who might menace the peace of the country. Never for a single moment did he give up his determination of freeing the lands for his beloved Indians and peons, had in fact worked out a most comprehensive scheme to accomplish this object and an extensive colonization project besides, ready to be put in operation just as soon as the financial, economic, and transportation conditions were in proper shape for it. But when that time had come and he disclosed his project and urged its immediate execution, it was too late. The interests he had befriended had grown too powerful and would brook no curtailment of their rights and holdings such as his plans demanded, and they turned against him and used the desperation of the impoverished masses they had been sucking dry for a generation to unseat him. Feudalism and his neglect to educate the masses accomplished his downfall and his really gigantic work of reconstruction would neither save him nor his Mexicans.

When the course of feudalism ran as unbridled and undisturbed as it had during his long tenure, sooner or later the time had to come when a constantly increasing volume of substance, power, and opportunity, falling into the hands of a constantly diminishing number, would leave so little for a correspondingly increasing number as to make impossible a middle class, the indispensable backbone of all republics, and throwing the economic and political equilibrium so out of proportion that a peaceful adjustment was no longer possible.

#### THE LESSON.

Thus the lesson of the fate of this truly great man and the lessons from the agony and convulsions of a bleeding continent, which are now humbling the intellects of the rulers and ruling classes of Europe, are re-yielding this simple and mighty truth, a truth as old as organized society had men but stopped in their greed to heed it. *"As governments safeguard the welfare of their masses in times of peace, so shall the masses safeguard their governments in times of storm and stress."*

The inauguration of free political institutions, and of an equality of material opportunity proved easy enough, but their maintenance in Mexico, as in China, and in a modified degree in Russia, required more than a piece of parchment. As liberty can not long endure in the absence of an equality of material opportunity, so becomes the latter impossible in the absence of an equality of intellectual opportunity, that is, in the absence of the fruits of enforced general education.

Both liberty and general prosperity are incompatible with ignorance and superstition. They cannot be achieved by great tumults alone, such as Hidalgo first, later Juarez and Diaz, and finally Madero and Carranza brought about, but evolve in the degree only as knowledge and enlightenment develop in the masses. They are the result and ultimate end of the great inherent process of progressive evolution which makes its way with knowledge only, sometimes advancing with peaceful steps, as in the United States, sometimes overturning the barriers that stand in the way amid the din of wars and revolutions. It is the condition of society where will is excluded and law is made on an objective reason, which convinces man's judgment that it is equitable.

These are the terms which are prescribed by the laws of man's constitution. Without them permanent and general liberty and general prosperity are but visions at the end of a rainbow, dangerous catch-words to draw the physical sacrifice of the masses, indispensable to the success of contesting self-seekers and adventurers who fatten on disorder.

Thus the revolution of 1911, born as it may have been of lofty aim, has long since degenerated into a blind and sordid game of contesting opportunities, kept agoing by the thousands reduced to starvation and abject dependence, who have more to hope from disorder than from peace, and who follow such leaders, who, for the time being, afford them the best protection and living conditions.

But the fuel that once fed the fires is giving out and Mexico is nearing a similar general exhaustion to that which enabled Diaz in 1876 to establish temporary peace and order.

But though there now appeared a leader of even superior powers, peace would be short lived unless basic conditions were changed. And even though he succeeded in re-establishing a practical equilibrium of material opportunity by making available for the masses all of the untoiled lands, mines, and forests, his efforts would still be in vain, unless his government were strong and honest and long-lived enough to protect them against their own ignorance, improvidence, and uncontrolled passions, while their general education and regeneration were being accomplished.

That such a government could be had and maintained during that critical period without the friendly and watchful co-operation of one or more of the leading powers of this continent is sadly doubtful.

But in any event, not until the schoolmaster and the hygienist have accomplished their herculean labors will Mexico be safe and the United States not endangered.

#### OUR RELATIONS WITH MEXICO.

Our ownership of the Panama Canal gave Mexico the most strategic position as concerns the interests of the United States. Protective though our intentions are in maintaining a trespass sign over our weaker, but no less proud neighbor's home, it will tax all our fiber, patience, tact, and diplomacy to have him accept our unsolicited patronage in good grace, and in good faith, when tempting foreign alliances and advances, threats, pressure, or invasion knock at his door.

Being without a strong government, without any coast defenses, any army or navy to speak of, being the constant playball of self-seeking, intriguing factions, and men not above selling out their country to obtain power or to control affairs, deeply in foreign debt, but teeming with untold wealth, bidding fair to become the leading producer of gold, silver, copper, and oil, oil one of the indispensables of modern warfare (with five of the leading nations now at war, France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Japan, producing little or none); Mexico is a country particularly susceptible to foreign aggression, thus endangering our own safety.

When in addition we consider that nearly one-half of Mexico's area lies north of our southern most point (Key West) ; that the distance between New York and Yokohama over her trans-isthmian railroad is 1,256 miles less than via the Isthmus of Panama ; that Hawaii is 1,273 miles nearer via the Tehuantepec railroad ; that Cuba is as near to the Mexican shore as it is to ours ; when all these facts are considered, together with many others, which space forbids enumerating, we must come to the realization that the Mexican situation involves more than a settlement of the differences and claims arising from recent events.

If Mexico should permit our enemies to use her fertile plains as a base, her convenient harbors and strategic railroads for the landing and transportation of hostile troops and war material, our glorious waterway will be hopelessly exposed to land attack, while our troops would be forced to fight their way through Mexico to reach Panama overland, a most stupenduous task, or else depend on our naval forces to land them on the Isthmus in large enough numbers and quick enough time to prevent disaster.

If on the other hand, Mexico be found on our side, placing her territory and resources at our disposal, enemies would be placed at so tremendous a disadvantage in trying to take and hold our Panama possessions as likely to deter them altogether.

*Such friendly attitude on Mexico's part would constitute the one safe and efficient fortification of the Canal, as well as an essential part of any program of Preparedness.*

Mere contractual neutrality would be worse than useless. In the event of an attack on our detached possessions, we would be forced to make use of her territory in one way or the other, while her own military and naval strength would be insufficient to enforce neutrality against a foreign power determined to make use of her territory.

Equally useless under her form of government and present and prospective internal conditions would prove a contractual treaty calling for mutual co-operation against foreign invasion. Such co-operation could never be enforced against the will of the Mexican people, even though everyone of her succeeding administrations were to act in good faith.

Yet Mexico's strategic location makes it imperative for this nation to command Mexico's co-operation at all times and at the same time makes it very expedient to have her defensive strength adequately developed. Without such effective co-operation the canal remains strategically our great weakness rather than the great strength it was intended to be.

Not that there is any immediate danger of foreign invasion of any part of this continent, but statesmanship must take such an eventuality into consideration in meeting present difficulties if it is to serve the nation beyond the tomorrow.

The unswerving steering toward a definite end when the needs to be served are not generally apprehended because they affect the more distant future, and at a time when more immediate difficulties and apparently humiliating situations would seem to demand a drastically contrary course is one of the most difficult and unpopular tasks statesmanship has to face. Thus a policy that might offer a quick and satisfactory way out of the present difficulties arising from Mexico's irresponsible condition might at the same time irreparably controvert the most essential part of a policy of future safety. Thus in the event of war, Mexico's co-operation in particular and that of Latin America in general would seem to constitute a most essential safeguard, and yet such co-operation could not be expected unless our attitude toward Mexico remained friendly and helpful.

There remains but the other alternative of fortifying the nation against a grave emergency, permanent military occupation, the traditional European method, always followed by disastrous reactions such as the old world is now passing through.

The application of that method, for example, even in its most enlightened and beneficent manner by Austria to her revolution ridden neighbors, Bosnia and Herzegovina, precipitated the war of 1914; while in contradistinction the application of the traditional American method in connection with Cuba brought her independence, peace, and prosperity, and resulted to much benefit to the United States and the world at large.

*Military occupation of Mexico aside from meaning all the horrors of a long war would, of course, be followed by the mistrust*

*and antipathy of all of Latin America, whereas her confidence and friendship so desirable in times of peace would be invaluable in times of war.*

Nor would the task of winning the confidence and lasting good will of the Mexican masses be as chimerical as certain interests of both countries would have us believe by continually harping on the fierce "gringo" hatred supposed to pervade the whole of the Mexican mass.

Even though this hatred were really general it could not be deeply grounded and hard to live down, being necessarily based on hearsay tales, easily disproved, because more than 85 per cent of the entire people are totally illiterate and but comparatively few have come in direct contact with Americans, and those who have, as laborers on American owned farms and mines, have almost invariably been pleased with their treatment and felt kindly disposed.

Among the remaining 15 per cent there does exist considerable dislike if not hatred, partly based on jealousy and partly due to the careless manners, the patronizing airs, intolerance, and provincialism of Americans. Here are also to be found the interests, self-seeking adventurers, politicians, and agitators, who make the preaching and spreading of the gringo hatred their butter, if not their bread. Their influence will be finally as nothing, once the masses are made to discover that their satanic monster-gringo is but a designing myth.

The lowly Mexican is quickly responsive to kindness and is loyal and grateful to those who befriend him. Kindness and fairness will win his confidence and conquer his heart.

Could the United States, for instance, in some way, arrange through their consular agents for the weekly distribution of corn, beans, and medicine among the millions of starving and ailing Mexican men, women, and children, any hatred, mistrust, or ill-feeling as might have existed previously would quickly change to doglike gratitude and devotion and gringo baiting, the wind in the demagogue's sails, would come to an abrupt end and the masses would eventually support such leaders and administrations only as would be friendly to the United States. *Perhaps the grave*

*problem of making of Mexico a trusted friend in need might best be solved by some such systematic campaign of helpfulness.*

Military intervention on the other hand would mean the sending of hundreds of good lives after every one life lost in the revolution, and the sending of millions of the taxpayer's good dollars after the bad dollars of a very few who voluntarily and with their eyes open preferred to develop the resources of a foreign country.

If by patiently waiting for the certain results of a campaign of persistent befriending as against a hasty military campaign of doubtful benefits and certain very serious complications, the lives, health, morals, and constitutions of thousands of American flower could be spared and the country escape the indescribable misery of a prolonged occupation, surely none but those bereft of all justice and pride or insanely blinded by self-interest could ever agitate, or even calmly contemplate the saving or promoting of their Mexican ventures with the blood, tears, and contributions of a whole nation.

Let us live up to our traditional policy of the Golden Rule in our foreign relations while we yet may. Nation after nation in duress is being drawn into a bottomless pit by the raging whirlpool of hatred and vengeance, the bloody harvest of Europe's ancient worship of the Iron Rule, and who knows but our turn may come after all!

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